

EXPLORING EFL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES OF LEARNER ROLES IN THE FEEDBACK PROCESS IN SPEAKING CLASSES

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ABSTRACT

Feedback plays a vital role in students' learning. Learner participation in the feedback process is closely associated with feedback effectiveness but limited attention has been paid to how students perceive their responsibilities and enact their roles in this process. Therefore, this study aims to explore EFL students' perceptions and practices of learner roles in the feedback process in speaking classes through the lens of the Student Feedback Literacy (Carless & Boud, 2018). A qualitative approach was deployed with 26 EFL students using focus group interviews and thematic analysis. The results show that most students appreciated the significance of feedback and learner engagement, but they lacked the skills to make judgments and sufficient ability to take action as feedback receivers, feedback providers, and feedback seekers. Their inadequate language proficiency, worries about face-saving, and perceptions of power distance led students to prioritize peer over teacher feedback and to prefer receiving feedback to giving or seeking it. These findings reveal that student engagement in the feedback process involves not only personal linguistic competence but strategic behaviors affected by sociocultural contexts.

Keywords: *EFL speaking; feedback literacy; feedback process; learner roles*

1. Introduction

Feedback has been recognized as a significant contributor to students' learning achievement by assisting learners in uncovering errors, clarifying misconceptions and identifying clear directions for future improvement (Chase & Houmanfar, 2009). Nevertheless, the effectiveness of feedback is linked with learners' engagement with the feedback process. In particular, Carless and Winstone (2023) argue that students' active engagement with feedback may be even more influential than the feedback itself in ensuring feedback effectiveness.

Despite this recognition, students do not always involve themselves in the feedback process productively.

Harutyunyan & Poveda (2018) report that many learners demonstrate low levels of engagement in revision tasks. A key factor contributing to this limited active participation is learners' difficulty in managing their emotional responses to teachers' oral corrective feedback. Prior empirical studies indicate that frequent oral correction, especially in front of the class, may result in negative emotions of frustration and embarrassment among students. These affective responses can discourage students from acting on the feedback they receive (Motbaynor et al., 2025; Ha et al., 2021). Moreover, insufficient language proficiency may constrain students to interpret oral corrective feedback accurately. In EFL speaking context, real-time interactions

between feedback provider and feedback receiver can make engaging with oral feedback challenging. Immediate feedback may disrupt students' speaking flow while delayed comments can result in forgotten mistakes and limited opportunities to repeat teachers' reformulations (Ha et al., 2021). Consequently, limited uptake of feedback may negatively impact its effectiveness, students' learning performance, and self-confidence in oral communication (Liu and Feng, 2023).

Many existing studies have concentrated on feedback effectiveness (Henderson et al., 2019; Dawson et al., 2019), students' preferences for feedback strategies (Mamoon-AL-Bashir et al., 2016; Haupt & Bikowski, 2014), and feedback techniques (Nguyen, 2016; Nguyen & Filipi, 2018), but primarily in writing skills. Meanwhile, learners' behaviors and roles in the feedback process, particularly in EFL speaking skills, have received limited empirical attention. Price et al. (2011) regards this gap as the "invisibility" of learner engagement. To date, insights into learner roles in the feedback process, especially in EFL speaking classes in Vietnam, have remained under-explored.

To address this gap, the present study investigates EFL learners' perceptions of their roles in the feedback process and how they enact these roles in speaking classes. Carless and Boud's (2018) Student Feedback Literacy is adopted in this study as a theoretical framework. In this framework, students are considered as active agents who appreciate, interpret and act upon feedback. It is suited to examining

learners' perceptions and practices of their roles in feedback engagement, an area that remains under-examined in EFL speaking contexts. Accordingly, the study seeks answers to the following research questions:

1. How do EFL students perceive their roles in the feedback process in speaking classes?

2. How do they actually enact these roles in the feedback process in speaking classes?

3. What factors influence students' enactment of learner roles in the feedback process in speaking classes?

A deeper understanding of students' perceptions and practices can help teachers adjust how to design, scaffold, and mediate feedback-related instructional activities, thereby enhancing interaction in EFL speaking class. In addition, given research on individual characteristics of how learners perceive and process oral corrective feedback remains limited (Ferris et al., 2013), the findings of this paper seek to contribute to the current literature on learner participation in feedback process in EFL speaking context.

2. Literature review

2.1. Feedback and learner engagement

Feedback plays an important role in learning by helping students identify the gaps between their current and expected performance (Ramaprasad, 1983). However, feedback effectiveness depends not only on the quality of comments but also on student engagement with feedback information (Henderson et al., 2019). In this regard, students are considered active agents in the feedback process through receiving, providing, and seeking feedback rather

than passive recipients. Therefore, understanding how students perceive and enact these roles is significant, specifically in EFL speaking classrooms.

2.2. Theoretical frameworks

This study adopts Student Feedback Literacy (Carless & Boud, 2018) as the primary framework to examine students' perceptions and enactment of learner roles in the feedback process, and Social Constructivism as a complementary perspective to explain the impact of contextual factors on student engagement with feedback in EFL speaking classrooms.

Student Feedback Literacy conceptualizes learners as active agents who appreciate, interpret, and act upon feedback. The framework includes four interrelated dimensions of appreciating feedback, making judgments, managing affect and taking action. These dimensions emphasize students' active engagement in the feedback process through receiving, providing, and seeking feedback, which is relevant to the focus of the study.

Social Constructivism theory views learning as socially constructed knowledge through interaction. In EFL speaking classrooms, feedback can be understood as a dialogic process including ongoing meaning negotiation between feedback providers and feedback receivers. This perspective helps explain how interactional and contextual factors shape students' enactment of learner roles in the feedback process.

2.3. Prior studies and research gap

Learner engagement with feedback

Learners engage in the feedback process through receiving,, providing,

and seeking feedback from teachers and peers. Such engagement enhances students' linguistic competence, confidence and critical thinking skills (Nguyen, 2016; Halim et al., 2021; Papi et al., 2019). Nevertheless, most students prefer receiving feedback to providing it as providing feedback is often cognitively and linguistically demanding (Hirose, 2012), and they also favor teacher feedback over peer feedback due to teachers' expertise (Alquefari, 2023).

Challenges in enacting learner roles

Despite the benefits of feedback engagement, students often struggle to enact the role of feedback providers due to linguistic, cognitive, and affective barriers. Limited language proficiency hinders students' ability to understand feedback, identify errors, and provide constructive comments. This insufficient language competence contributes to cognitive difficulties in understanding and applying feedback effectively. Additionally, affective factors such as lack of confidence and fear of criticism may inhibit students from responding to received feedback, offering helpful comments, and actively seeking feedback (Hirose, 2012; Zhang, 2017; Papi et al., 2019).

However, prior studies have mainly examined separate aspects of feedback, such as peer feedback, self-feedback, teacher corrective feedback, primarily in writing contexts. This focus may overlook students' simultaneous enactment of multiple roles and their emotional experiences in the feedback process. In particular, limited attention has been paid to EFL speaking classrooms, where feedback is immediate, dialogic, and emotionally

situated. Therefore, the present study conceptualizes students as active agents who receive, interpret, and act upon feedback, exploring their perceptions and enactment of their roles in the feedback process in EFL speaking classes.

3. Methods

This paper employed a qualitative research approach to respond to the questions above. In this section, information about the setting, the participants, data collection instrument and analysis will be briefly described.

3.1. Participants

A key informant sampling technique was utilized. There were 26 English-majors (19 females and seven males) at a state university in the South of Vietnam. They were from 18 to 22 years old, including fifteen freshmen, six sophomores, and five juniors in the second term of academic year 2024-2025. Their language proficiency was between intermediate and upper intermediate, equivalent between B1 and B2 levels in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). They all had prior experience with feedback-related activities in speaking classes. They were frequently required to provide peer feedback in pair-work or group oral presentation, as well as involved in peer and self-feedback on speaking recordings as homework. Teachers often provided worksheets and explained assessment criteria (vocabulary/grammar, cohesion and coherence, accuracy and fluency, interaction), guiding students to identify strengths, weaknesses and suggestions for future improvement, rather than explicitly and formally trained in how to

give feedback in the classroom. This experience can ensure their familiarity with feedback practices to provide necessary information about their perceptions of learner roles and their enactment of these roles in the feedback process.

3.2. Data collection instrument

The study employed focus group interviews as the primary data collection method. The interviewees were students from the same faculty, enrolled in English speaking courses with comparable language proficiency and at similar year levels. Group interviews were considered a favorable context for critical reflection, as the members will influence each other by responding to the ideas raised in the group and conflicting opinions may be illuminated (Greenfield et al., 2007). The information is, therefore, richer and more diverse. The interview questions focused on three principal dimensions of their roles in the feedback: (1) students' perceptions of feedback and their roles in the feedback process, (2) students' reflections on their own feedback practices, (3) and their perceptions of the challenges related to their enactment of their roles in the feedback process. The present study aimed to have EFL students recount what they thought about learner involvement and how they enacted these roles during the learning process to achieve the progress.

3.3. Procedure

The interview was implemented in the last three weeks of the second semester (academic year 2024-2025). The author informed the participants on informed consent, anonymity, the storage of confidentiality, the sensitivity

of questions, and compensation. They were aware that the interview was recorded. The interview was administered in Vietnamese to ensure convenience and absolute comprehension. After being clearly informed and explained about the theme and purpose of the study, the participants were asked to respond to a number of questions related to the topic. Each group lasted approximately 40 minutes and all groups proceeded until all the participants had no further information to share. The author conducted the interview in a flexible and moderated manner according to the group dynamics to assure the discussion remained on the topic with very little contribution to the discussion. Finally, every recording was saved in a separate file for data analysis.

3.4. Data analysis

Thematic analysis was used as the main method of data analysis and interpretation in this study as it “offers an accessible and theoretically flexible approach to analyzing qualitative data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The Student Feedback Literacy was applied as an analytical lens through its four components. Each participant was assigned as a code (S1, S2, S3, and so forth) to ensure anonymity.

First, the information was transcribed, translated, and re-read several times to achieve familiarity with the data. Second, meaningful units related to students’ perceptions and enactment of learner roles in the feedback process were identified and coded. Next, similar codes were grouped and categorized into themes. These themes were later compared and refined in relation to the four dimensions of the Student Feedback Literacy and Social Constructivism perspectives. Simultaneously, the representative quotes were extracted to illustrate the findings. Then the themes were interpreted through the Student Feedback Literacy and Social Constructivism.

To enhance reliability, the interview data were repeatedly read to ensure familiarity with the data. The coding process was grounded on the four dimensions of the Student Feedback Literacy. The data were compared across the participants to identify recurring patterns. The results of the thematic analysis comprising the identified themes, codes and representative evidence are presented in table 1.

Table 1: *Themes, Codes, and Evidence from the Thematic Analysis*

Themes	Code	Evidence
Appreciating feedback	Speaking improvement	Feedback was helpful for improving pronunciation, fluency, interaction, and confidence (S3, S6, S8, S12)
	Trusted teacher feedback but friendlier peer feedback	Teacher feedback was valued for expertise, clear criteria, and detailed guidance (S1, S2, S10).
	Mainly as receiver	S4 “ <i>feedback only becomes useful when the receiver understands and applies it.</i> ”

Themes	Code	Evidence
Making judgments	Limited self-assessment	Many students struggled to identify and self-correct their own speaking errors (S17).
	Difficulty in providing peer feedback	Peer feedback was cognitively and linguistically demanding because they needed to identify mistakes and give polite comments (S2, S4, S14).
Managing affect	Anxiety from teacher feedback	Public teacher feedback often reduced students' confidence and motivation (S1, S7, S15).
	Face-saving	Students softened criticism to maintain harmony and protect peers' feelings (S3-S16).
	Emotional preference for peer feedback	Peer feedback was friendlier than teacher feedback (S10, S16).
Taking action	Feedback response	Most students reviewed feedback and attempted to apply it in subsequent speaking practices (S1-S16).
	Limited peer feedback	Students provided feedback mainly when required by teachers and tended to avoid critical comments (S3-S16).
	Limited feedback seeking behavior	Students rarely sought teacher feedback due to fear of negative evaluation as being incompetent (S4, S8, S14).

4. Findings and discussion

4.1. Findings

The findings were interpreted through the lens of Student Feedback Literacy to explain students' perceptions and enactment of learner roles in the feedback process in EFL speaking classrooms.

Appreciating Feedback

All students had positive perceptions of feedback in speaking classrooms. Feedback assisted them in developing language aspects, particularly intonation, organization, fluency, and clarity. Students also reported that they could identify repeated mistakes, reduce misunderstandings, and improve

confidence. In addition, the participants appreciated engagement in the feedback process, raising awareness of errors, enhancing evaluative skills and stronger peer relationships. *"I think engaging in the feedback process raises my awareness of errors, helps me realize strengths and weaknesses from others for future performance"* (S18). Similarly, S22 noted that *"The engagement enables me to develop evaluative skills as well as have closer relationships with my classmates."* Most participants perceived themselves mainly as feedback receivers while other students identified themselves as feedback providers or seekers. Some participants emphasized that learners

were decision-makers in the feedback process as feedback only became effective when students interpreted and applied it (S4).

Making Judgments

Most students demonstrated a limited ability to make evaluative judgments in the feedback process. The majority of students reviewed, analyzed, and learned from the received feedback, while few students were able to identify strengths and weaknesses, self-correcting their own speaking performance, and setting future goals independently. Providing feedback to peers and themselves was more cognitively and linguistically demanding given that students had to simultaneously understand peer ideas, identify mistakes and select appropriate language to offer comments. Meanwhile, limited language proficiency made it difficult to fully comprehend the received feedback and provide detailed comments. *“I am not really competent enough to identify my own errors by myself; I do not know where and how to correct myself.”* (S17).

Managing Affect

The majority experienced anxiety when receiving direct teacher feedback, particularly in front of the class. This experience could reduce their motivation and self-confidence. In this regard, peer feedback was considered as a safer and friendlier feedback environment despite being perceived less accurately. Many students tended to avoid direct comments to maintain harmony and protect their own and their peers' face. They were also reluctant to seek teacher feedback due to fear of being perceived as incompetent, and became

demotivated when receiving negative comments. *“I feel pressured when receiving teacher feedback since it is so strict and has so many negative comments, which makes me so disappointed and demotivated”* (S15).

Taking action

All of the participants enacted their main roles as feedback receivers. When receiving feedback, they noted the major information, attempted to understand it and used it for later practice at home. When receiving feedback for their recordings as homework, most respondents reviewed comments, analyzed information and drew experience for subsequent products. Nevertheless, only few students self-assessed their work in terms of strengths and weaknesses to comprehend errors, then self-corrected mistakes, and set goals compared with future products.

Many students participated in providing feedback to peers when it was required by teachers. They tended to avoid pointing out multiple mistakes simultaneously to maintain friendship and protect their classmates' emotional comfort. Most interviewees appreciated the learner role as feedback providers. However, it seems that they did not proactively enact this role.

Students also demonstrated limited feedback-seeking behavior. About one-third of the interviewees sought feedback mainly for clarification when they did not fully comprehend the comments they received. Many participants appreciated teachers as a reliable feedback source but they more frequently approached their friends, as their classmates were more accessible and used simpler language for easier

understanding. As S10 revealed, *“I often ask for explanations from peers because they are friendly and accessible, they also give detailed clarification. On the other hand, teachers are often too busy and their comments are sometimes difficult to understand and not personalized enough.”*

In brief, students were generally engaged in the feedback process with the roles of feedback providers, receivers and seekers. Nonetheless, the main part they played was feedback receivers; they offered feedback due to teachers' request, and seeking-feedback behavior was still unpopular among students.

4.2. Discussion

The findings reveal that students appreciated feedback as an improvement tool for speaking performance and confidence. Nevertheless, they primarily positioned themselves as feedback receivers rather than active agents in the feedback process. Feedback was perceived to be most useful when it was clearly understood and actively applied to speaking practice while providing feedback was more challenging for students. From a social constructivist perspective, this receiver-oriented perception suggests that feedback is viewed as knowledge transmitted by teachers rather than an interactive process of co-constructing meaning through interaction. These findings support Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick's (2006) which foregrounds that feedback effectiveness depends on learners' active engagement. Such perceptions may be shaped by cultural expectations about teachers as primary knowledge providers in the classrooms. As a consequence, despite appreciating the

value of feedback, students' understanding of learner roles as active agents in the feedback process remains limited. This is consistent with Nguyen (2016), who highlights that Vietnamese EFL students often regard teachers as prime authority in knowledge construction. This implies that teachers should explicitly introduce feedback as a dialogic and interactive process between teacher-students and among peers in EFL speaking classes.

Regarding making judgments, students' evaluative ability remains limited. The majority review and understand feedback but only few can critically identify their own errors, self-correct and set future goals. This limitation is shaped by cognitive and linguistic constraints. Insufficient language competence contributes to difficulties in fully understanding feedback and carrying out effective self-correction, as well as providing feedback both accurately and politely to maintain group cohesion. These findings are consistent with Qusem's (2020) and Hirose's (2012) which reports that limited language proficiency constrain learner engagement effectively in the feedback process. Social Constructivism suggests that evaluative judgment develops through interaction but students' limited participation in peer feedback may reduce opportunities to co-construct knowledge with peers. This study extends prior works by showing that students' evaluative skills are shaped not only by cognitive skills but also linguistic and relational factors. Therefore, to develop students' judgmental ability, pedagogical support should strengthen students' languages

for interpreting and providing feedback, and structured reflection that guides students to identify errors, interpret feedback, and set concrete future goals.

Furthermore, emotional dimensions strongly shape students' engagement with feedback. They tend to avoid critical comments to protect their own and their peers' face. Face-saving was often prioritized over critical evaluative engagement. Teachers' public feedback was also perceived as a threatening act and reduced students' self-confidence. This fear makes peer feedback safer despite being considered as less reliable. It can be said that emotional safety plays a decisive role in students' feedback preferences and behavioral engagement as classroom learning is socially mediated through interaction with others. These findings echo the studies by Bjørndal (2020) and Fithriani (2018) who claim that face-saving act has a significant impact on classroom interaction in collectivist learning cultures when learners prioritize group harmony over individual expressions. These results suggest that teachers should be aware of students' needs for emotional safety and face-saving in the classrooms. Hence, public feedback should be provided carefully to maintain students' confidence and motivation. Private feedback channels for support feedback exchanges beyond the classrooms or structured peer feedback may be applied to protect students' emotional comfort.

Finally, the enactment of learner roles in the feedback process is primarily limited to feedback receivers. Most students reviewed feedback, understood it, and applied it in subsequent speaking

practices but rarely critically self-assessed their own performance and set future goals. They sometimes engaged in peer feedback under teachers' requirements but tended to avoid emotional discomfort. Feedback seeking behaviours are even more restricted and mainly for clarification. This pattern reveals that learner engagement in the feedback process in EFL speaking classes remains largely receiver-oriented. From a social constructivist lens, limited engagement in the feedback process may reduce collaboration and knowledge construction. These findings are aligned with Nguyen (2016), who reports that students often view feedback provision as teachers' responsibility. Pedagogically, this suggests that structured peer feedback tasks should be carefully designed, with repeated practice of providing and interpreting feedback. A safe and supportive environment should be established to inspire students' feedback seeking behaviors, and student feedback literacy also should be explicitly trained in the classrooms.

Taken together, students' perceptions of learner roles generally correspond with their enactment in the feedback process in EFL speaking classes. The role of feedback receivers is perceived and enacted as primary, whereas feedback providers and seekers remain relatively limited. Although students appreciated the value of feedback, their evaluative skills, emotion regulation, and active engagement were challenged by linguistic, relational, and contextual constraints. From Student Feedback Literacy and Social Constructivist

perspectives, these results indicate that feedback engagement depends not only on individual linguistic competence but also social and interactional classroom conditions. Theoretically, this study extends the Student Feedback Literacy by demonstrating that the enactment of learner roles in the feedback process in EFL speaking classrooms is also shaped by sociocultural and relational factors, particularly face-saving concerns and the cultural expectations about teacher responsibility in the classrooms. Therefore, fostering student feedback literacy in EFL speaking contexts requires explicit training and emotional support to support students in moving from receiver-oriented engagement toward more proactive learners in the feedback process.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

The findings revealed that EFL students were generally aware of the value of learner engagement in the feedback process and enacted these roles as feedback receivers, providers, and seekers in practice. Nevertheless, their enactment of these roles was not always effective due to inadequate language proficiency, face-saving concerns, and perceptions of teachers primarily as authorities. These findings indicate that students had positive perceptions of learner engagement in the feedback process but their actual enactment of these roles remained limited in practice.

Pedagogically, teachers should first explore learners' beliefs about learner

roles in the feedback process to encourage more active engagement. Explicit and continuous training during the feedback process should be integrated into speaking courses, including how to provide constructive comments, interpret feedback effectively, and seek clarification. Facilitating collaborative and supportive learning environments where students feel emotionally safe to ask questions and exchange feedback. The provision of motivational and personalized feedback is also worth paying teachers' attention to enhance students' self-confidence and motivation. In particular, cultural and affective factors, such as teacher authority, face-saving concerns, and group harmony, among Vietnamese students to design appropriate activities that enhance students' active engagement in feedback interactions.

The study is limited by the small sample size and the use of a single data collection method which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to a larger population. Further research is needed to include larger samples and additional data resources to provide deeper insights into learner roles in the feedback process. Additionally, further studies may also compare teachers' and students' beliefs of learner roles in feedback process, and investigate the effects of feedback training programs and feedback-seeking behaviors among EFL students in other speaking contexts.

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TÌM HIỂU NHẬN THỨC VÀ THỰC TIỄN CỦA SINH VIÊN CHUYÊN NGỮ VỀ VAI TRÒ NGƯỜI HỌC TRONG QUÁ TRÌNH PHẢN HỒI TRONG LỚP HỌC KỸ NĂNG NÓI TIẾNG ANH

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TÓM TẮT

Phản hồi đóng vai trò quan trọng đối với hiệu quả học tập của sinh viên. Sự tham gia của người học vào quá trình phản hồi ảnh hưởng đến hiệu quả phản hồi. Tuy nhiên, cách sinh viên nhận thức và thực hiện vai trò của mình trong quá trình này ít được biết đến. Do đó, bài báo này muốn tìm hiểu về nhận thức và thực tiễn thực hiện vai trò của người học trong quá trình phản hồi trong lớp kỹ năng nói tiếng Anh dưới góc nhìn của khung năng lực xử lý phản hồi của Carless và Boud (2018). Bài viết dùng phương pháp nghiên cứu định tính. Dữ liệu được thu thập thông qua phỏng vấn nhóm tập trung đến từ 26 sinh viên chuyên ngữ và được phân tích theo chủ đề. Kết quả nghiên cứu chỉ ra rằng hầu hết sinh viên đã nhận thức được tầm quan trọng của phản hồi và việc tham gia của mình trong quá trình phản hồi, nhưng lại thiếu kỹ năng đánh giá dẫn đến khả năng hành động còn hạn chế, họ cũng thích nhận phản hồi hơn là cho và tìm kiếm phản hồi. Nguyên nhân là do năng lực ngôn ngữ thấp, văn hóa giữ thể diện và nhận thức về khoảng cách quyền lực giữa thầy và trò vẫn còn theo truyền thống. Các kết quả nghiên cứu này chỉ ra rằng năng lực xử lý phản hồi không chỉ gồm năng lực ngôn ngữ cá nhân mà còn cả hành vi mang tính chiến lược ảnh hưởng bởi yếu tố văn hóa và quan hệ xã hội.

Từ khóa: *Kỹ năng nói tiếng Anh; năng lực xử lý phản hồi; quá trình phản hồi; vai trò của người học*